

## You shall make the planks of the Mishkan of shittim wood, standing erect. (26:15)

The *Midrash* (*Shemos Rabba* 35:2) derives an important lesson from the Torah's requirement that wood used for the *Mishkan* be *shittim*, acacia wood. The acacia tree is a non-fruit bearing tree. Hashem said, "If a person wants to use wood to build for himself a house, he should take into account that the King of Kings, to whom everything belongs, chose non-fruit bearing trees as a source of wood for the *Mishkan*; likewise, man should do the same." Just because we want to build a house for ourselves, it does not mean that we have the right to destroy a tree that supplies nourishment.

Hashem is teaching us a way of life. Whatever we do should not impinge on someone else. This applies to everything. The end does not justify the means. Therefore, we should not build a *shul*, school, *mikveh* – anything used for a holy endeavor - on the *cheshbon*, at the expense, of others. Indeed, it is especially at such a juncture, when one embarks on a *davar she'b'kedushah*, holy endeavor, that he might become swept away with a righteous frenzy which obliterates all sense of right and wrong, all sensitivity towards others, even all parameters of human decency.

**Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl**, portrays a frightening analogy which, when we think about it, is quite realistic and, sadly, all too possible. Imagine that our generation has been selected to build the *Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash*. Can we begin to envision the excitement, the overwhelming frenzy that will grip everyone as each has a part to play, a role in creating this edifice? We will forget about everything else, as nothing will matter, nothing will stand in the way of our participating in this event. Nothing: the sick people whom we are used to visiting; the poor people who rely on our *Shabbos* packages, or weekly/monthly alms; the senior citizens whom we help on a regular basis. We simply do not have the time, energy, desire, because we are all wrapped up with the latest rage to capture our attention.

The *Mashgiach* goes one step further. It has just been announced that *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* has arrived! We begin to run, pushing and shoving anyone whose misfortune it is to be in our way. The very young and old, frail and slow, become statistics as we surge forward to be part of this epic experience. Those who pass out or become injured are quickly moved to the side as each one of the hardy ones vie for their place in history.

We may never forget the "little guy," the one whom we push to the side and ignore because we are into bigger and better things. Great people do not neglect those who at the moment do not play a significant role in the scheme of things. No one and nothing is viewed as insignificant by truly great people.

**Horav Aharon Kotler, zl**, spearheaded *Vaad Hatzalah*, the Relief and Rescue of Holocaust survivors. He worked with incredible *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, to save Jewish lives. *Vaad*

*Hatzalah* was a priority, because Jewish lives were at stake. One night, in ill health and flushed with fever, the *Rosh Yeshivah* traveled to Washington, D.C. and walked in rain and snow from government office to government office to plead for Jewish lives. Yet, as busy as *Rav Aharon* was with building a *yeshivah*, working day and night for *Klal Yisrael*, he never forgot about the *prat*, individual. He would drop everything to help the individual in need – and he would do it with the very same enthusiasm that he manifested when he was working on behalf of the *Klal*, general community. He was of the opinion that *ein b'klal el amah she'b'prat*, “The whole only consists of its individual parts.” The value of *Klal Yisrael* as a whole is equivalent to the value of its individual members. He never lost sight of the individual; his sensitivity to each and every individual Jew never diminished as a result of his *klal work*.

One particular incident that impacted this writer occurred with **Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl**. While the actual story may not be earth-shattering, it demonstrates the thinking and sensitivity of a great man to something which most – better yet, probably all – would have ignored. It was at the conclusion of the *chupah* of a close student; the glass had just been broken. The student turned to his revered *Rebbe* to give him a kiss. This was the apex of his *simchah*, moment of joy. It was the moment – and he wanted to share it with the one person most responsible for altering the course of his life. *Rav Shlomo* smiled broadly and said, “Go kiss your mother first.” He was a *Rosh Yeshivah* who put his student’s education first. He was educating his student. A mother comes first.